

Starting a Licensed Child Care Center In North Dakota

Opening a successful child care center takes time, effort and study. Successful programs demand purposeful planning including: realistic timelines, adequate funding, research on the best practices for children's healthy development, high quality staffing and team work with lead child care agencies in the state. The most beneficial information will be obtained by working with licensing staff and Child Care Resource & Referral early in the planning process. Since each child care center project is unique, timelines will vary greatly, but **on average, plan 9-12 months to fully organize and prepare a center for opening.**

STEPS TO TAKE TO OPEN A CHILD CARE CENTER:

1. Contact a child care licenser at the county social services office to discuss plans and to request a copy of the North Dakota Child Care Center Administrative Code (Chapter 75-03-10). Read and become familiar with each of the rules outlined in Administrative Code. Contact information for county licensers can be found at <http://www.nd.gov/dhs/locations/countysocialserv/> or by calling 701-328-3541 or 800-245-3736.
2. Contact Child Care Resource & Referral (CCR&R) for assistance. Contact information for CCR&R can be found at www.ndchildcare.org. CCR&R can also be reached by phone at: 800-452-3646 in eastern ND or 888-223-1510 in western ND. The ND Department of Human Services contracts with CCR&R to offer a limited amount of pre-licensing technical assistance at no cost to the requestor. CCR&R will assign a child care consultant to help with the details of starting a child care center and review good business practices for starting and operating a child care center. **NOTE: The child care consultant is not a county licenser and does not have the authority to issue a license.**

The CCR&R child care consultant will provide information related to:

(The following is a sample list of consultation topics that will be provided.)

Child care supply and demand information	CCR&R can help determine the demand for specific child care needs within a community or region.
Business plans including start-up and operating budgets	Financial planning and goal setting is a crucial component of center planning and should be addressed early. Some factors that will impact the budget are: staff to child ratios and group size standards. Information on the Child Care Assistance Program and the USDA Child and Adult Food Program will be provided, since both programs can also affect your budget planning.
Zoning information	CCR&R can provide contact information for local zoning rules. Zoning requirements may affect where the child care center will be located. The local zoning authority can help explain the procedure for obtaining a permit, if necessary.
Location and space for a child care center including indoor and outdoor space.	** Caution — do not enter into a lease agreement or buy a location without first meeting with a child care consultant, licenser and inspectors. Information on evaluating locations will be offered to help determine whether a proposed building site will need any modifications. Special considerations need to be made for children's usable space needs including: natural lighting, appropriate plumbing, accessibility, ideal outdoor space needs, security etc.
Building, fire and health inspections	
	Before a license can be issued, document that the building meets state and local building, fire and health codes.

Food and nutrition	Consider options for food preparation at the center (catering vs. on-site food preparation.) Commercial kitchen standards may apply for on-site preparation. Learn more about the USDA Child and Adult Food Program.
Qualifications and duties for a child care center operator and director	Options are available to obtain certifications and degrees. The timeframe that is needed to complete a degree or certification is important to keep in mind as you plan for your center. It is estimated to take 12-24 months to complete a CDA certification (the minimum qualification for director role).
Legal Structures for businesses	CCR&R has a business center to help identify legal structure options, such as for-profit and not-for-profit status. Determine the appropriate business structure in cooperation with a tax accountant and attorney and gain an understanding of the rules that apply to the structure chosen. Grant funds are often restricted to non-profit organizations.
Program Policies, Procedures and Forms	A CCR&R consultant can provide information to aid in developing personnel policies, program policies & procedures, contracts, permission forms etc.
Training for Director and Staff	A variety of training options are available. CCR&R can assist in finding meaningful training to meet director and staff needs, even prior to caring for children.
Children's programming, equipment and supplies	A CCR&R consultant can supply information to help structure and equip a child care program in a way that enhances children's development and learning as well as planning for teaching staff and families' needs. Before purchasing equipment, contact the CCR&R consultant for suggestions for high quality equipment choices, based on research.

3. Make application inquiry by contacting your county child care licenser. The licenser will provide further information and orientation related to rules/regulations. Pre-licensing site visits are also likely to take place to ensure readiness for formal application and licensing. The following is a partial list of documents will need to be submitted with a formal application.

Application to be Licensed (SFN 832) signed by owner/operator	Background Check Form for all Staff/Volunteers (SFN 508)
Application fee of \$40.00	Proof of Liability Insurance
Documentation to Verify Qualifications of Staff and Director	Copy of Center Child Care Policies/Procedures
Copy of Fire Inspection Report with verification of corrections made	Programming Schedule
Copy of Health/Sanitation Report with verification of corrections made	Floor Plan
Documentation of current First Aid and CPR certification	Emergency Procedures
Copies of TB Test results	Other forms required by administrative rule
Health Information Certification (SFN 836)	

4. After the submission of all application materials, allow 60 days for a complete review by the county child care licenser and issuance of a license by the Department of Human Services.